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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 11 October 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Wenaweser ..... (Liechtenstein)

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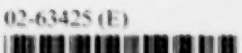

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 43: Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (A/57/350)

Agenda item 105: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/57/41 and Corr.1, A/57/295 and A/57/402)

1. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), introducing his report (A/57/402 and Corr.1) said that, over the past year, the progress made on the agenda of children afflicted by armed conflict had been particularly remarkable. The highlights included the entry into force of two key international instruments for which he had been campaigning: the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Security Council had strengthened its engagement on that issue and had moved from enunciating general principles to recommending concrete measures, as exemplified by resolutions 1314 (2000) and 1379 (2001). Moreover, for the first time, it had agreed to receive from the Secretary-General a list of names of parties that continued to recruit and use children in armed conflict. Also, reports from peacekeeping operations now included a section on children and recommended measures to improve their situation.

2. The role of child-protection adviser had been reviewed and strengthened. There were now 10 children-protection advisers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, two in Sierra Leone and one in Angola; the initiative would be followed up in Afghanistan and through the newly-established United Nations office for West Africa.

3. Over the past two years, his office had played a major role in the establishment of two important working groups: the first was reviewing the integration of child protection into all United Nations peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building activities, and the guidelines it had drawn up were being finalized; the second was examining the training of peacekeeping personnel; the manuals it had prepared were being tested and would be available shortly.

4. Eighteen months earlier, he had proposed a research agenda for children in armed conflict; it had now become a full-fledged programme, managed by the Social Science Research Council in New York, which was coordinating a consortium of international institutions and scholars working to provide information on the subject.

5. His office had been promoting the establishment of national commissions for war-affected children in the aftermath of conflict. Currently, there was one in Sierra Leone and a consensus had been reached in Northern Ireland, where a commissioner would probably be appointed in early 2003. A child-protection unit had also been set up in the context of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

6. The outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children had devoted a significant section to the protection of war-affected children, and special events had been held to increase awareness of their plight. His office was working to ensure that there could be no impunity for those who abused children in war and that child protection was integrated into all truth-seeking processes and tribunals. It had also been advocating the involvement of young people in peace processes by reaching out to schools and creating youth networks.

7. During the previous 12 months, he had visited seven conflict areas. In Northern Ireland, the participation of youth in the peace process was being consolidated, particularly with the projected appointment of the commissioner for children. However, grave concerns remained about the continuing practice of "punishment beatings", the recruitment of young people into paramilitary groups, and community and school segregation along sectarian lines.

8. In Guatemala, the Government had ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption. However, the enactment into law of the code on children and adolescents remained pending, and several commitments under the Peace Agreements with regard to children and youth had not yet been implemented. He called on the Government to redouble its efforts to ensure compliance with those measures.

9. He had visited Ethiopia and Eritrea in the context of the border conflict between the two countries; it was the only conflict situation where he had not seen any evidence of the systematic use of children. The visit

had taken place in the aftermath of events in West Africa when children had been exploited in the context of the distribution of relief supplies. In the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea most of the relief supplies were handled by local authorities and community leaders and no abuse of young peoples had been reported. Both Governments had now accepted the boundary commission's decision, which opened the way to addressing urgent issues related to landmines, separated families, resettlement and basic supplies.

10. The war having ended in Angola, the Government had ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (the Ottawa Convention) and was asking the international community to help respond to humanitarian problems in areas previously inaccessible. Pending issues included landmines and the sale of natural resources for purchasing basic goods and services.

11. His visit to the Russian Federation had taken place in the context of the war in Chechnya. The principle of the voluntary return of internally displaced persons was being respected, and a military order had been issued to provide greater accountability and transparency and combat the abuse of the civilian population by the security services. He called on the insurgent forces that were recruiting and using children to cease the practice immediately and on all parties to stop using landmines.

12. In Afghanistan there were high levels of malnutrition and poverty, and the displaced population, particularly on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, was enduring deplorable conditions. A significant investment was necessary to provide schools, health care and better nutrition for young people; the donor community had responded generously to the situation and he hoped that the funds pledged and committed would be disbursed as soon as possible.

13. Looking ahead, there were five challenges. First, it was necessary to raise public awareness about the progress made by the United Nations in elaborating international instruments and standards. Second, more needed to be done to systematically monitor and report on the compliance of parties to conflicts with existing international instruments. Third, the international community should work with families, teachers, religious leaders and local civil organizations to build up national and subregional networks for advocacy and child protection. Fourth, although progress had been made in putting the issue of children in armed conflict on the agenda, more had to be done to embed it in the institutional process within and outside the United Nations. Fifth, there was a need to reach out more vigorously to children and youth and engage them in efforts to protect other young people caught up in conflict situations.

14. **Ms. Stamatopoulou** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, in addition to the regular work of the United Nations mechanisms in the field of children's rights, two major events had been held: the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the General Assembly's special session on children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had submitted its biennial report (A/57/41 and Corr.1), which included an analysis of the progress achieved by States parties in implementing the Convention, and trends and challenges in the areas of general measures of implementation (paras. 14-37) and general principles (paras. 38-51). During 2002, the Committee had held three regular sessions, at which it had considered initial and periodic reports of 27 States parties and had adopted a general comment on the role of national human rights institutions in promoting and protecting child rights, which emphasized the unique role such institutions could play. It had also organized a general discussion day on the private sector as service provider and its role in implementing child rights, when it had adopted a set of recommendations addressed to both State parties and non-State actors.

15. Accession to and ratification of the two optional protocols to the Convention was proceeding rapidly. Within just over two years of their adoption by the General Assembly, 100 States had signed and 41 had ratified or acceded to both instruments. The Committee had adopted reporting guidelines for both optional protocols and the initial reports were expected early in 2004.

16. Only two more instruments of acceptance were needed for entry into force of the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention raising membership of the Committee from 10 to 18. The Committee had a backlog of approximately 60 reports and hoped that the increase in membership would help it to address the problem. That, however, would require a corresponding

increase in the servicing capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner.

17. Following the general discussion days on violence against children held in 2000 and 2001, the Committee had requested the Secretary-General to undertake an extensive study on the issue. The General Assembly had endorsed the principle of such a study (resolution 56/138) and the Office of the High Commissioner, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization had established at the beginning of 2002 a core support group to facilitate the study.

18. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had visited South Africa recently and would be visiting France in November 2002.

19. The special session of the General Assembly on children had given momentum to the reaffirmation of the rights of children and had culminated in the Declaration entitled "A world fit for children" (A/S-27/19/Rev.1). The Office of the High Commissioner would support the implementation of its recommendations in areas within its mandate, particularly human rights education, the trafficking and sale of children, and the administration of juvenile justice. In their reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, States parties had been encouraged to include information on measures taken and results achieved in the implementation of the Plan of Action contained in the outcome document.

20. **Mr. Gautam** (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the message that emerged clearly from the special session on children was that, to achieve the millennium development goals, children should be at the heart of the development agenda. The outcome document sought to create a child-friendly world by putting the overall development of children at the forefront of national and global priorities. To that end, Governments had agreed to work with their partners to prepare specific action plans by the end of 2003 and, while several countries in the Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean regions had already prepared national programmes of action, UNICEF called on all Governments to accelerate preparation of their national follow-up plans and hoped that it would be done well before the end of 2003.

21. While Governments had the primary responsibility for implementing the Plan of Action adopted at the special session, UNICEF was committed to playing its part in helping implement, monitor and report on the follow-up to the special session and had provided specific guidance to its country offices and national committees. It was also preparing a guidance note for member States and would be seeking donors and members of the international community to provide strategic support to address the situation of children in the least developed countries and in countries in transition. For example, UNICEF was working to ensure that countries in sub-Saharan Africa gave high priority to investment in children as part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In all its activities, UNICEF would strive to ensure a close linkage with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and would collaborate closely with the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

22. The goals, targets and strategies of the Declaration entitled "A world fit for children" needed to be pursued in the broader context of the Millennium Declaration and the millennium development goals. Some of the latter goals had extremely ambitious targets and, based on historical evidence, were unlikely to be achieved unless a strong foundation was built over the next few years by attaining the slightly more modest goals of the Declaration. In most of the poorest countries of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, none of the goals would be achieved or sustained unless HIV/AIDS and its related problems were tackled relentlessly, and ceasefires were implemented in order to protect children from the ravages of wars and conflicts.

23. To create "A world fit for children", UNICEF asked that the item should be a regular feature on the General Assembly's agenda and offered, in collaboration with its sister agencies and other development partners, to help the Secretary-General prepare periodic progress reports on the follow-up to the special session on children and on the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol, so that the Third Committee would have a solid basis for its work in that respect.

24. **Mr. Bazel** (Afghanistan), referring to Mr. Otunnu's visit to Afghanistan, said that his delegation strongly supported the concept of the establishment of national commissions for children and recommended

that the initiative should be explored with the competent Afghan authorities.

25. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) noted that the Special Representative's report (A/57/402 and Corr.1), as in previous years, had not mentioned the situation of children living under foreign occupation, although that situation had been considered in the Declaration of the special session on children. There appeared to be a trend to ignore the situation of children living under foreign occupation and, to date, there had never been an acceptable response. Ignoring the situation would only perpetuate problems in that regard. Her delegation hoped that future reports would cover the situation.

26. **Mr. Kühnel** (Austria), speaking in his delegation's capacity as chair of the Human Security Network, said that the issue of children in armed conflict had been high on the agenda of that organization since its creation in 1999. Under Austria's chairmanship, the Network had decided to develop a support strategy designed to strengthen international action in all appropriate forums, support ongoing monitoring activities, draw attention to the special needs of girls in armed conflict and highlight the importance of fighting against impunity.

27. He inquired about the most effective methods of strengthening the monitoring and reporting of violations of the rights of children in armed conflict and wondered how the issue of child protection, in particular the protection of girls, could be integrated more systematically into United Nations operations.

28. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), in response to the remarks made by the representative of Afghanistan, said that he appealed once again to the international community to continue providing assistance to Afghan children.

29. Addressing the comments made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, he said that he was extremely concerned about the situation of children in the Palestinian occupied territories, and although he had not dwelt on the issue during the current session of the General Assembly, it had been one of the key themes of his statement to the Commission on Human Rights in April 2002. Owing to circumstances beyond his control, he had been unable to make on-site visits in the past twelve months but hoped to be able to do so in the near future. He expressed his wish to do more to address the issue.

30. Turning to the questions put by the representative of Austria, he said he was grateful to the Human Security Network for prioritizing the rights of children and said that his Office would collaborate closely with that organization. There was no single more pressing task than the search for a way to better organize the international community's procedures for monitoring the activities of parties in conflict, and although various international, regional and national standards gave some guidance on how to conduct such activities, it was not yet clear how those activities could be improved.

31. Although some monitoring was currently being carried out by non-governmental organizations, there was a need for a serious, systematic and ambitious arrangement which would make it clear to parties in conflict that their activities were being scrutinized by the international community and that they would be held accountable for human rights violations. In that connection, he hoped to be able to present the Committee with some options in the course of the next few months.

32. **Mr. Gautam** (Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF) said that the United Nations as a whole was extremely proud of the achievements in Afghanistan with regard to the provision of basic services and would continue to assist the country to meet the challenges that lay ahead.

33. In response to the remarks made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning the tendency to ignore the plight of children in the occupied territories, he recalled that the Secretary-General and representatives of UNICEF had recently spoken on that subject and assured the Committee that the situation of children in Palestine was constantly under review.

34. Turning to the questions raised by the representative of Austria, he said that girls caught up in armed conflict were disproportionately disadvantaged, and therefore it was essential to prioritize their education to prevent them from being exploited. The United Nations was committed to promoting the welfare of girls, and in that connection the Secretary-General was spearheading a campaign involving the participation of 13 United Nations specialized agencies.

35. **Ms. Stamatopoulou** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), in response to the questions put by the representative of Austria, said that systematic advocacy programmes in the area of children's rights in armed conflict were essential and that the Human Security Network would be a useful vehicle to promote such programmes.

36. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), addressing the remarks made by the representative of Austria, said that the plight of girls in armed conflict was of particular concern to him. His Office had highlighted the issue in its work with the Security Council, and had called for special attention to be paid to girl soldiers and to the alarming spread of HIV/AIDS among girls in areas of conflict. In that connection, discussions were under way with the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UNICEF about conducting a study to document the correlation between HIV/AIDS infection and conflict. In the wake of allegations that relief supplies in West Africa had been used to exploit children, especially girls, his Office had adopted a strong position and hoped that forthcoming guidelines in that area would emphasize the protection of girls. Furthermore, in the context of the two working groups on peacekeeping, training and guidance material for peacekeeping personnel now contained detailed information on child protection and made special reference to girls.

37. Lastly, he had placed particular emphasis on the protection of girls during his country visits. One country in particular, namely Rwanda, had made great strides in that area: as a result of the explosion of so-called "girl-headed households" following the genocide, the Rwandan Government had decided to amend its legislation so that women and girls could inherit property and land. Such measures should be emulated by other States.

38. **Mr. Amorós Núñez** (Cuba) asked the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict how the role of the General Assembly in orienting and evaluating protection programmes for children in armed conflict could be strengthened.

39. **Ms. Groux** (Switzerland) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the comments made by the representative of Austria regarding the Human Security Network.

40. She welcomed the formulation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child of guidelines regarding initial reports to be submitted by States parties to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Given the volume of work that would be created by the consideration of States' reports, it was crucial to increase the number of Committee members from 10 to 18, and in that connection she inquired what proactive measures the Office of the High Commissioner was taking to encourage the two remaining States parties to approve the amendments to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

41. She asked the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the representative of UNICEF what was being done to prevent the voluntary recruitment of child soldiers.

42. She also wondered how the Secretary-General's list of parties to armed conflict that recruited or used children in violation of the international obligations applicable to them, established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1379 (2001), could contribute to more effective monitoring and reporting of violations of the rights of children in armed conflict.

43. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for Palestine) thanked the Special Representative for his concern about the situation of Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation. Her delegation was looking forward to collaborating with his Office to work out ways of assisting those children and hoped that he would be able to visit the area as soon as possible.

44. She emphasized the gravity of the situation in Palestine — one third of those killed and wounded during the conflict had been children — and urged the international community to act rapidly to prevent further loss of life.

45. **Ms. Stamatopoulou** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), in response to the question posed by the representative of Cuba, said that a creative dialogue between the General Assembly and the Committee on the Rights of the Child had already begun. She believed that two aspects of the recent work of the Committee, namely the discussion about the role of national human rights institutions in the area of children's rights and the suggestion that the private sector should act as a service provider in that area, could be taken up and elaborated upon by the General Assembly.

46. With reference to the proposed amendment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, she said that the Office of the High Commissioner had sent letters to the States parties which had not yet accepted it. She appealed to all States parties to bring the situation to the attention of their authorities so that the amendment could enter into force as soon as possible.

47. **Mr. Gautam** (Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF), in response to the question raised by the representative of Cuba, said that he welcomed the increased importance that had been attached to the issue of children in recent years. He hoped that, as part of the follow-up to the special session on children, the situation of children would be discussed in the plenary Assembly and that reports produced by UNICEF on the situation of children in the context of the millennium development goals would also receive attention in that forum.

48. With reference to the proposed amendment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF was actively promoting its acceptance, since the Committee on the Rights of the Child was clearly overstretched and desperately needed more members.

49. Turning to the issue of the publication of the Secretary-General's list, he said that ignorance was one of the major reasons for inaction and neglect and that "naming names" would bring violations of the rights of children into the public domain and incite civil society organizations to put pressure on Member States to prevent them.

50. He reassured the Committee that the United Nations system was fully aware of the situation of children in the Palestinian occupied territories and was doing all it could to ensure the provision of basic services and alleviate the impact of armed conflict.

51. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), responding to the question raised by the representative of Cuba, said that all aspects of the activities of his Office fell within the framework of the General Assembly's mandate. His main annual report was addressed directly to the General Assembly, and he had suggested that the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict to the Security Council should also be addressed to that organ. Furthermore, he had recommended the holding of the annual dialogue session because he welcomed Member States' contributions. He hoped that there would be complementarity and close cooperation between the Security Council and the General Assembly but that the individual jurisdiction of each would be respected.

52. As to the Secretary-General's list, he said that its significance was essentially political: a specific request by the Security Council for the names of perpetrators lent legitimacy to reporting and monitoring activities and sent a clear signal to Member States. He stressed, however, that publishing the list was no substitute for finding a genuine solution to the problem of effective monitoring.

53. He took note of the comments made by the representative of Palestine and agreed that the situation in the occupied territories was very grave. He would strive to do more to respond to it.

54. **Mr. Koren** (Israel), in response to the remarks made by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Palestine, said that attacking children simply because they were children, regardless of their religion or nationality, was a sad practice. However, the fact remained that Palestine had initiated the violence and his delegation rejected all attempts to cast the perpetrators of terror as its victims. He called for an investigation into the increasing use of minors as suicide bombers and encouraged UNICEF to work in Palestinian territory to promote education for peace and tolerance.

55. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Senegal) said that, as part of the follow-up to the special session on children, ECOWAS had decided to hold an extraordinary summit in November 2002 devoted solely to the situation of children in West Africa to discuss how the recommendations and conclusions of the special session on children could be implemented. In that connection, he inquired as to the state of UNICEF's preparations for the summit.

56. **Mr. Nsendyla** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his delegation was grateful to UNICEF and to the Special Representative for their efforts on behalf of Congolese children. Referring to document A/57/402, paragraph 41, he asked if the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be issuing a report.

57. **Ms. Loemban Tobing-Klein** (Suriname) emphasized the importance of human rights education

in the promotion and protection of children's rights and asked how countries could be encouraged to do more in that area.

58. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was very important to his Office, and that he was pleased at the recent movement towards peace, although the massacres at Kisangani had been disturbing. Indeed, another aspect of the exploitation of children not sufficiently recognized was the use of young people in the illicit exploitation of natural resources, and he had made sure that the Panel of Experts would not neglect the child-exploitation aspect of that issue.

59. **Mr. Gautam** (Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF) said, in response to Israel, that education for peace and tolerance was very much part of the UNICEF agenda. In fact, paragraph 47 of the Declaration of the special session reflected that emphasis. Programmes for Palestinian children focused on play and learning non-violence. Human rights education, as mentioned by the representative of Suriname, was also important, as human rights began with children's rights. He was also grateful to the President of Senegal for his initiative to follow up the special session at the regional level. UNICEF would be an active participant at the forthcoming regional conference.

60. **Ms. Stamatopoulou** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the Office took a holistic approach to human rights education. In order to achieve broad and long-term goals, targeted sectors must be integrated across the board.

61. **Ms. Løj** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said that the international community must ensure that the outcome document of the special session was translated into action. To that end, it must develop new legislative and other measures to protect and promote children's rights, making the child's best interests paramount. The specific situation of the girl child should also be highlighted.

62. Together with its optional protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provided the normative framework for all European Union actions in respect of children, including special session follow-up.

63. Although the Convention was supposed to apply to all children, the rights of many children around the world were not being realized, particularly those belonging to marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Protection of the rights of disabled children, indigenous children and children belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities merited particular attention.

64. At the special session, children had made it clear that they wanted to see the Convention on the Rights of the Child implemented. Their impatience was well-founded, since an enormous gap existed between the good intentions reflected in international treaties and real-life conditions, with millions of children continuing to suffer poverty, neglect, involvement in armed conflict and exploitation.

65. The European Union attached great importance to children's health. Reproductive health services were also crucial to the fight against poverty, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) making a major contribution in that domain.

66. The European Union continued to view global abolition of the death penalty as a key priority and to press for universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention, after all, unreservedly prohibited imposition of capital punishment for offences committed by persons below 18 years of age. The European Union continued to oppose impermissible reservations to that instrument and to urge their withdrawal. All States parties should also ratify and implement the two Optional Protocols. The European Union welcomed the important work accomplished by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and called upon all parties to cooperate fully with that monitoring mechanism.

67. The European Union was particularly concerned by the poverty, armed conflict and violence to which children were exposed. Indeed, poverty was the root cause of most infringements of children's rights. The fact that the realization of the economic, social and cultural rights of children was crucial to development made it all the more important for the international community to make poverty eradication a matter of priority. In that connection also, States should continue

to devote special attention to the needs of children when implementing the Millennium Declaration.

68. The European Union wished to pay tribute to the Special Representative for mobilizing official and public opinion for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. For its part, the European Union would focus in all appropriate forums on reinforcing international action in favour of such children, with particular emphasis on ensuring early warning for violations of children's rights, supporting ongoing United Nations monitoring and rehabilitation activities and raising awareness of the special protection needs of girls in armed conflict and the importance of the fight against impunity.

69. The European Union reiterated its total rejection of all forms of violence against children, including harmful traditional practices. The countries on whose behalf she spoke had implemented a range of measures to combat exploitation of children, with various ongoing programmes also under way at the regional level. Free, accessible and good-quality education was a key to combating that other form of exploitation, child labour.

70. The European Union remained committed to working together with other Member States and the United Nations system to identify the most effective means of strengthening support for children's rights. It was committed to shoulder its share of the global responsibility of making the world fit for children. As children at the special session had declared, such a world would be fit for everyone.

71. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that every child being unique, it was incumbent upon all States to provide the environment in which all children could prosper. They must accordingly also ensure that a gender perspective was taken into account.

72. Several recent international developments had considerably strengthened the legal framework for child protection, including the entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nevertheless, millions of children still lacked reason for optimism. The international community must thus come to terms with gaps between the normative framework and implementation. In that context, it was important to ensure that the protection of children in armed conflict continued to be deliberated by the Security Council. Evidence of large-scale trafficking of young girls was also a matter of grave concern, requiring consolidated action on the part of the international community. International personnel sent into the field to help solve the problem must clearly not be allowed to become a part of it. There had been too many cases of international personnel involved in the sexual exploitation of children. Her delegation was also greatly concerned at the imposition of the death penalty on children and wished to urge all States that had not already done so to give juvenile offenders a second chance.

73. Since it was often said that many Governments only paid lip service to children's rights, the time had come to change that situation and take concrete action in behalf of all children.

74. **Mr. Guo Yang** (China) said that China had played an active part in the special session on children and would continue making considerable efforts to ensure concrete follow-up. The international community must eliminate the root causes of the problems affecting children, in particular by creating an environment favourable to their healthy development. His delegation wished to pay tribute to the efforts of the United Nations system in that area.

75. In the 1990s, to fulfil its commitments towards its large population of children, China had implemented a national programme comprising 49 targets, including reduction of child mortality, promotion of universal primary education and protection of children in difficult situations. He was pleased to announce that those targets had largely been achieved by the end of 2000. China had now launched a new programme for the period 2001-2010, including new targets in the areas of health, education, legal protection and the environment. The Government was currently seeking input from civil society and the judiciary as it prepared its second periodic report for submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

76. **Ms. Viotti** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the members of MERCOSUR and the associated countries Bolivia and Chile, said that the full protection of children and adolescents was fundamental to the MERCOSUR Social Commitment, which gave priority to the special needs of children and youth in situations of violence, sexual abuse, child labour, early pregnancy, drug abuse and crime. At the same time, MERCOSUR member countries were striving to reduce

poverty in the region, and were concerned at its impact on child labour.

77. They reaffirmed their intent to ensure the right to basic education and improve access to secondary education and vocational training, key tools for poverty eradication and social and economic mobility. They were committed to providing quality health care, with particular attention to children and adolescents, and to reducing infant and maternal mortality rates, the impact of early pregnancy, preventable disease and the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Trafficking in children, child prostitution and the situation of street children were other priority areas for action.

78. MERCOSUR and associated countries reaffirmed their commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They would have favoured its explicit recognition as the highest legal standard for the protection and promotion of children's rights in the outcome document of the special session, but welcomed nonetheless the sound human-rights approach taken in the document.

79. The international community had a clear vision and a common platform for action to ensure a better life for children and adolescents. The time was ripe to implement them with genuine political will and renewed solidarity.

80. **Ms. Ramirez** (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been a turning point in the approach to childhood: after the entry into force of the Convention, a child was no longer considered an object of protection, but had begun to be considered a subject of law, endowed with rights which were differentiated because of the special vulnerability of a child as a person still being formed. The Convention made the State responsible for putting children first, and stipulated that the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration.

81. Despite those principles, adopted unanimously by the international community, millions of children continued to be threatened by disease, ignorance, poverty, exploitation, discrimination and violence. That deplorable situation was not because of a lack of national policies or international commitments, but because of the lack of resources allocated for children and of a real desire to make a difference in their situation. States must provide channels for children to participate in defining policies and programmes affecting them.

82. Children were not asking for commitments on paper; they wanted action. States must concentrate on allocating sufficient resources to meet the commitments made at the special session. The unity demonstrated in the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by consensus must be translated into dedicated action for children.

83. **Ms. Velasco** (Mexico) said that children in her country faced many challenges, and the National Development Plan 2001-2006 gave priority to education and health care in order to improve conditions for school-aged children. A programme to improve their health, with emphasis on indigenous groups, rural communities and low-income families in urban areas, was part of an integral education strategy.

84. Mexico had legislation for the protection of children and adolescents. It had set up programmes to reach street children, who where at risk for exploitation or abuse in the child sex trade. It had also established a national children's network, made up of children aged 10 to 17, which promoted the rights of children in every state.

85. By 2001, Mexico had met most of the targets set at the World Summit for Children in 1990. The outcome of the special session was being incorporated into public policy, and progress was being made on the establishment of an office to coordinate the various institutions involved in meeting the commitments established in the Declaration adopted at the special session, entitled "A world fit for children".

86. **Mr. Mamdouhi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) noted that humanitarian efforts over the past decade had improved children's access to safe water, sanitation facilities, food, education and immunization, resulting in the survival of more children. Despite such progress, however, children remained society's most vulnerable members. Too many continued to live below the poverty line, malnourished or starving.

87. Given the changes in the nature, scope and causes of the problems affecting children, the international community must update its strategies and goals to meet current challenges. All stakeholders must also reaffirm their joint commitment to improving the situation of all children, including the most disadvantaged. Children used as civilian targets in armed conflicts — especially

in territories under foreign occupation — should be given priority. He wished to highlight in that regard the situation of Palestinian children, who were daily exposed to atrocities, such as being shot to death for throwing stones at occupying troops. The international community must not remain indifferent, but rather must bring to justice all those who committed war crimes, particularly against children.

88. The Islamic Republic of Iran was vigorously pursuing implementation of its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Taking account of the current situation, the Government had launched a new five-year plan to guarantee the survival, health, protection and integral development of children. A people-centred approach was being incorporated into the country's development strategies and programmes, with the quality of life of children emerging as a new focus of concern. Despite unfavourable external factors, economic hardship and the long-term financial implications of hosting more than two million refugees, over 40 per cent of the national budget had been allocated to child development across a variety of sectors. Such progress in the realization of children's and women's rights could be explained by strong political will, Iran's rich Islamic cultural heritage, strong family ties and good cooperation with relevant United Nations bodies, especially UNICEF.

89. By identifying common means of addressing threats to the entire international community, in particular to its children, it would be possible to foster policies, programmes and actions to protect and promote the rights of children and a better future for all humanity.

90. **Mr. Chuquihuara** (Peru) said that a country's indicators on the status of its children and youth were a reflection of the progress it had made and of its future potential. Likewise, the level of investment in children and adolescents would indicate the prospects for success in sustainable development, poverty reduction and the strengthening of democratic institutions. The Government considered the best interests of children to mean their greatest possible level of physical and mental health and well-being, and to that end had designed social policies that took into account its multi-ethnic and multicultural society.

91. In efforts of the current Government for the consolidation of democracy, poverty eradication and promotion of equal opportunity, children were considered key agents of development. Accordingly, the National Governance Agreement adopted in July 2002, setting out policy outlines for the next 20 years, included provisions for the protection, education and health of children. A National Plan of Action for Children 2002-2010 was aimed at making structural changes in the situation of children, which was marred by social inequities.

92. Poverty, unequal distribution of income and social exclusion were the principal factors affecting children. Efforts were being concentrated in the areas of health, education and social participation in order to ensure universal access to high-quality health care, to promote education as one of the main tools for combating poverty, and to ensure the participation of children and adolescents in efforts to combat such problems as alcohol and drug abuse and child exploitation, which could have devastating effects on their lives.

93. The time had come to move from concepts to execution and evaluation of progress made. Such an exercise would require dedication and effort, but would result in better living conditions for children.

94. **Ms. Al-Malki** (Qatar) said that an important principle for building a world fit for children was the affirmation of the rights and duties of families. Her delegation praised the importance attached to the family in the Declaration adopted at the special session on children.

95. Qatar had endeavoured in the past decade to implement its national and international commitments vis-à-vis the rights of the child. Its initial report under the Convention had been considered at the twenty-eighth session of the Committee. The Committee had approved of the initiatives taken by Qatar in implementation of the Convention, as reflected in Act No. 25 of 2001 concerning compulsory and free education for all children, and a plan to publicize the Convention within the country. The Committee had also praised Qatar for its sizeable financial assistance to developing countries.

96. Qatar had also adopted a national plan to study the living conditions of its children. That study would form a basis for determining strategic goals for the next decade. A draft law was being prepared and would represent a comprehensive legal framework for the rights of the child. Qatar had also reported to the International Labour Organization, on implementation

of Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour. A law of 1961 proscribed child labour in the country.

97. In December 2001, Qatar had acceded to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and in July 2002, it had acceded to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It furthermore set the minimum age to join the armed forces at 18.

98. Qatar aimed to let children participate in national activities. Recently, in the context of a Gulf media forum on the rights of the child, held in Doha, with the collaboration of UNICEF, a workshop had been organized around television programmes for children. At the end of the workshop, the children participating had adopted recommendations for children's television programmes.

99. Given the importance of the activities of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Qatar had approved the proposed amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention, raising the membership of the Committee to 18; that would help alleviate the Committee's workload. Qatar wished that the Committee would take into consideration the religious and cultural diversity of the States parties to the Convention.

100. Palestinian children were suffering daily under Israeli oppression, and their rights were violated. Her delegation urged that violence against those children should stop, and that their right to live in dignity, security and peace be respected. Iraqi children were also suffering under the economic sanctions, and many had died, with the result that Iraq had one of the highest child mortality rates in the world. Iraqi children should be immune from the effects of the sanctions.

101. **Mr. Andjaba** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that the 1990 World Summit for Children and the recent special session on children had given increased momentum to national, regional and global efforts to promote and protect the rights of children, by laying a solid foundation for developing and implementing pertinent policies and programmes.

102. The member States of SADC had always attached great importance to the welfare of children. They remained firmly committed to the Declaration and Plan of Action of the 1990 World Summit and welcomed the adoption of the outcome document of the special session, entitled "A world fit for children". Yet, despite their efforts, they were faced with numerous challenges that had reversed hard-won economic and social gains.

103. Some member States had been severely affected by armed conflicts in which millions of persons had been killed over the last decade. Many children had been orphaned and some had been displaced by war, both internally and to neighbouring countries. A significant number had been seriously injured, and some permanently disabled, often by landmines. Others had been forced to become child soldiers, human shields, spies, porters and sex slaves, and while most child soldiers died in battle, many suffered deep emotional scars that could result in a continuing cycle of violence.

104. The member States of SADC strongly condemned the recruitment of children as soldiers, which they considered to be a crime against humanity. The task of demobilizing, rehabilitating and reintegrating such children into society was complex but crucial. SADC commended the efforts of the United Nations agencies and all those involved in such work, while calling on the international community to help affected countries rebuild war-torn societies and establish mechanisms for a speedy reintegration of children. Moreover, as required by the Plan of Action of the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, help was also needed to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in such weapons.

105. The members of SADC welcomed the peace agreements between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda and applauded the developments that had brought peace in Angola.

106. Since education was a key factor in human development, poverty reduction and the promotion of peace and stability, there was an urgent need to develop and implement strategies to ensure good-quality basic education for all children. Member States reiterated their obligation under a SADC protocol to provide children with nine years of schooling in order to eradicate illiteracy.

107. The current drought, compounded by such factors as widespread poverty and HIV/AIDS, presented a daunting challenge to the development efforts of SADC

countries. Some 14 million people, most of them children, were threatened by starvation. The assistance of the United Nations and its agencies, as well as other donors, was greatly appreciated.

108. The HIV/AIDS pandemic was creating an increasing number of orphans. Girl-children continued to be most at risk, and mother-to-child transmission increased the impact on children. The SADC member States had established a strategic HIV/AIDS framework and programme of action (2000-2004) aimed at addressing the problem using a multisectoral approach, and in November 2002 Namibia would be hosting the Second Regional Conference on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children. However, additional resources and affordable life-prolonging drugs should be made available; it was important to ensure that the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria would be sustainable.

109. All SADC member States had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and many were in the process of ratifying its Optional Protocols. They were committed to ensuring that national legislations conformed, insofar as possible, to the four overarching principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the view of the child.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.